



3 1761 06839799 1

2000-2001

PR
4703
E3

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

28
P5535
Y2

EDWARD FITZGERALD

412402
25.5.43

12

2/10

12

Edward FitzGerald.

412402
25,543

A POET, like a prophet, sometimes suffers from a lack of appreciation on the part of his neighbours. Mr. Groome, in his interesting article* on Edward FitzGerald, informs us that two old ladies of Aldeburgh, whenever they heard the name of their distinguished townsman mentioned, used always to smooth their black mittens and remark: "*We* never thought much of Mr. Crabbe," intellectual superiority not being a recognised quality in that slightly barbaric region. We have consulted some authorities of Woodbridge respecting Edward FitzGerald. One of them informs us that the only thing he knew of him was that he was an "eccentric man who walked about with his mouth open and his hat at the back of his head." Woodbridge evidently entertained a great man unawares. The letters of Edward FitzGerald, edited by Mr. Aldis Wright, have delighted the reading world. The art of letter-writing is not lost, but it is wrong to mention art in conjunction with such letters, which are written in "the purest, simplest, raciest English," without a shade of affectation, or a thought that they would ever be subjected to public criticism. Of course there are superior persons who see nothing in them, but as usual they are in a hopeless minority. FitzGerald's description of Madame de Sévigné's letters might be applied to his own: "good sense, good feeling, humour, love of books and country life."

Edward FitzGerald was born in 1809 at Bredfield Hall, near Woodbridge. He was educated at Bury School, where he acquired the friendship of James Spedding, William Bodham Donne, and John Kemble, afterwards Licenser of Plays and a great Anglo-Saxon scholar; on leaving Bury he entered Cambridge University, where he first met his friends, the Tennysons.

Edward FitzGerald's name was first known in America through Mrs. Kemble's account of his family in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Mr. FitzGerald is described as a most amiable and genial

* In *Blackwood's Magazine*.

Irish gentleman, the possessor of large property in Ireland and Suffolk, with a house in Portland Place, where he, with his wife, who was also his first cousin, lived in great state. Mrs. FitzGerald is described as a "very handsome, clever and eccentric woman."

"One member of her family, her son Edward FitzGerald, has remained my friend till this day: his parents and mine are dead; of his brothers and sisters I retain no knowledge; but with him I still keep up an affectionate and to me most valuable and interesting correspondence. He was distinguished from the rest of his family, and indeed from most people, by the possession of very rare intellectual and artistic gifts. A poet, a painter, a musician, an admirable scholar and writer—if he had not shunned notoriety as sedulously as most people seek it, he would have achieved a foremost place among the eminent men of his day, and left a name second to that of very few of his contemporaries. His life was spent in literary leisure, on literary labours of love of singular excellence, which he never caused to be published beyond the circle of his intimate friends: Euphranor, Polonius, a collection of dialogues full of keen wisdom, fine observation, and profound thought; sterling philosophy written in the purest, simplest, raciest English; noble translations, or rather free adaptations, of Calderon's two finest dramas, 'The Wonderful Magician' and 'Life's a Dream,' and a splendid paraphrase of the Agamemnon of Æschylus, which fills its reader with regret that he should not have Englished the whole of the great trilogy with the same severe sublimity. In America this gentleman is better known by his translation, or adaptation—how much more of it is his own than the author's I should like to know, if I were Irish—of Omar Khayam, the astronomer-poet of Persia."

Having adopted no profession on leaving Cambridge, Edward FitzGerald seemed at one time to have intended to adopt a farming life on scientific principles. Perhaps he was wise in rejecting the idea. In the meantime he was much amused at the lucubrations of his friends, Donne, John Kemble and Edgeworth, in the *English and Foreign Review*.

"Since I saw you I have entered into a decidedly agricultural course of conduct: read books about composts, &c. I walk about in the fields also where the people are at work, and the more dirt accumulates on my shoes the more I think I know. Is not this all funny? Gibbon might elegantly compare my retirement with that of Diocletian. Have you read Thackeray's little book, 'The Second Funeral of Napoleon'? If not, pray do; and buy it, and ask others to buy it, as each copy sold puts 7½d. in T.'s pocket, which is very empty just now, I take it. I think this book the best thing he has done. What an account there is of the Emperor Nicholas in Kemble's last Review—the last sentence of it (which can be by no other man in Europe but Jack himself) has been meat and drink to me for a fortnight. The electric-eel at the Adelaide Gallery is nothing to it. Then Edgeworth fires away about the 'Odes of Pindar,' and Donne

is very æsthetic about Mr. Hallam's book. What is the meaning of 'exegetical'? Till I know that, how can I understand the Review?"

Edward FitzGerald was very much amused by receiving an invitation to figure as a lecturer to the cultivated mechanics of Ipswich. Wild horses would not have brought him to make such an exhibition of himself. He writes to Bernard Barton:

"New honours in society have devolved upon me the necessity of a more dignified deportment. A letter has been sent me from the Secretary of the Ipswich Mechanics' Institution, asking me to lecture—any subject but Party Politics or Controversial Divinity. On my politely declining, another, a fuller and more pressing letter, was sent, urging me to comply with their demand. I answered to the same effect, but with accelerated dignity. I am now awaiting the third request in confidence; if you see no symptoms of its being mooted, perhaps you will kindly propose it. I have prepared an answer. Donne is mad with envy. He consoles himself with having got a Roman History to write for Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopædia. What a pity it is that only lying histories are readable. I am afraid Donne will stick to what is considered the truth too much."

Owing to rash speculation in coal mines by FitzGerald's father the family pecuniary position had naturally suffered. When Mr. FitzGerald died in 1852, his son writes that he died like "poor old Sedley in 'Vanity Fair,' all his coal schemes at an end, saying, 'That engine works well!' in the stupor of death." FitzGerald had taken up his abode at Boulge Cottage, with an old Suffolk woman, Mrs. Faiers, as his housekeeper, and his cats, dogs and his parrot, "Beauty Bob." He finally in 1873 lived at Little Grange, Woodbridge.

"It is true; I really do like to sit in this doleful place with a good fire, a cat and dog on the rug, and an old woman in the kitchen. This is all my live stock. The house is yet damp, as last year; and the great event of this winter is my putting up a trough round the eaves to carry off the wet. There was discussion whether the trough should be of iron or of zinc: iron, dear and lasting; zinc, the reverse. It was decided of iron, and accordingly iron is put up. Why should I not live in London and see the world? you say. Why then, I say as before, I don't like it. I think the dulness of the country people is better than the impudence of Londoners; and the fresh cold and wet of our clay fields better than a fog that stinks *per se*; and this room of mine, clean at all events, better than a dirty room in Charlotte Street."

FitzGerald's dislike for London society increased every day. A London dinner-party he seems to have especially disliked.

"You know my way of life so well that I need not describe it to you, as it has undergone no change since I saw you. I read of mornings—the same old books over and over again, having no command of new ones:

walk with my great black dog of an afternoon, and at evening sit with open windows, up to which the China roses climb, with my pipe, while the blackbirds and thrushes begin to rustle bed-wards in the garden, and the nightingale to have the neighbourhood to herself. We have had such a spring (bating the last ten days) as would have satisfied even you with warmth. And such verdure! White clouds moving over the new-fledged tops of oak trees—and acres of grass striving with buttercups. How old to tell of, how new to see!”

The following letter was written when staying at Geldeston, where his brother-in-law Mr. Kerrieh lived. FitzGerald was very fond of his children.

“I sit writing this at my bed-room window, while the rain (long looked for) patters on the pane. I prophesied it to-day: which is a great comfort. We have a housefall of the most delightful children; and if the rain would last, and the grass grow, all would be well. I think the rain will last: I shall prophesy so when I go down to our early dinner. For it is Sunday; and we dine, children and all, at one o’clock; and go to afternoon church, and a great tea at six—then a pipe (except for the young ladies)—a stroll—a bit of supper—and to bed. Wake in the morning at five—open the windows and read Ecclesiasticus. A proverb says that ‘everything is fun in the country.’”

Carlyle wrote to FitzGerald that he had passed an “unforgettable day” with Alfred Tennyson. We fancy that this was the meeting when an American author was present, and a terrific discussion took place between these lights of mankind—Carlyle shrieking out for the return of William the Conqueror, to rule over us again, and defending with delight the conduct of that humane monarch, in cutting off the legs of 1200 Cambridgeshire gentlemen. “Let me tell your returning hero, then,” said Tennyson, “one thing, he had better steer clear of my precincts, or he will feel my knife in his guts very soon.” FitzGerald is quite justified in writing that no one conversed so wisely as Alfred Tennyson, and that he ought to have a Boswell to record his inspired talk.

“I smoked a pipe with Carlyle yesterday. We ascended from his dining-room, carrying pipes and tobacco, up through two stories of his house, and got into a little dressing-room near the roof: there we sat down: the window was open and looked out on nursery gardens, their almond-trees in blossom, and beyond, bare walls of houses, and over these roofs and chimneys, and here and there a steeple, and whole London crowned with darkness like the illimitable resources of a dream. I tried to persuade him to leave the accursed den, and he wished—but—but—perhaps he *didn’t* wish on the whole. . . . A cloud comes over Charlotte Street, and seems as if it were sailing softly on the April wind to fall in a blessed shower,* upon the lilac buds and thirsty anemones somewhere in Essex; or, who knows? perhaps at Boulge. Out will come Mrs.

* There was a great drought when this letter was written.

Faiers, and, with red arms and face of woe, haul in the struggling windows of the cottage, and make all tight. "Beauty Bob" will cast a bird's-eye out at the shower, and bless the useful wet. Mr. Loder will observe to the farmer, for whom he is doing up a dozen of Queen's Heads, that it will be of great use: and the farmer will agree that his young barley wanted it much. The German Ocean will dimple with innumerable pin points, and porpoises rolling near the surface sneeze with unusual pellets of fresh water—

‘ Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer cloud,
Without our special wonder ? ’ ”

Lockhart relates that Laidlaw, after hearing Sir Walter Scott and Sir Humphry Davy converse, cocked his eye like a bird, with : “ Eh, sir, this is a superior occasion ; I wonder whether Shakespeare and Bacon ever met to screw ilk other up.” It is a pity there was no listener to hear the interchange of opinions between those two most original men, Carlyle and FitzGerald. Carlyle generally preferred listeners to talkers. The late Mr. Allingham used to walk with him in the evening, when Carlyle used, as FitzGerald said, to rave at everything and propose nothing. One evening, on returning to the gate, Mr. Allingham ventured to say, “ I have listened to you with great pleasure, Mr. Carlyle, but I do not entirely agree with you.” “ Allingham, Allingham ” answered the injured sage, “ you always will have the last word.”

Edward FitzGerald had formed a sincere friendship with Parson Crabbe, the son of the poet. It is curious that the parson had never read his father's works till he was persuaded by his friend to perform that painful ceremony. Sir Walter Scott's eldest son is said never to have read his father's novels.

“ I have written enough for to-night : I am now going to sit down and play one of Handel's overtures—as well as I can—‘ Semele,’ perhaps, a very grand one—then, lighting my lantern, trudge through the mud to Parson Crabbe's. Before I take my pen again to finish this letter, the new year will have dawned—on some of us. ‘ Thou fool ! this night thy soul may be required of thee ! ’ Very well : while it is in this body I will wish my dear old F. J. a happy New Year. And now to drum out the Old with Handel.

“ New Year's Day, 1851—A happy New Year to you ! I sat up with my Parson till the Old Year was past, drinking punch and smoking cigars, for which I endure some headache this morning. Not that we took much ; but a very little punch disagrees with me. Only I would not disappoint my old friend's convivial expectations. He is one of those happy men who have the boy's heart throbbing and trembling under the snows of sixty-five.”

One of the characteristics of Edward FitzGerald was his

devotion to the writings of Sir Walter Scott. He read his novels over and over again, finding new beauties every time.

"The 'Pirate' is, I know, not one of Scott's best; the women, Minna, Brenda, Norna, are poor theatrical figures. But Magnus and Jack Bunce, and Claud Halero, though the latter is rather wearisome, are substantial enough; how wholesomely they swear! And no one ever thinks of blaming Scott for it. There is a passage where the company at Burgh Westra are summoned by Magnus to go down to the shore to see the boats go off to the deep-sea fishing, and 'they followed his stately step to the shore as the herd of deer follows the leading stag, with all manner of respectful observance.' This, coming in at the close of the preceding unaffected narrative, is to me like Homer, whom Scott really resembles in the simplicity and ease of his story. This is far more poetical in my eyes than all the effort of —, etc., etc. And which of them has written such a lyric as 'Farewell to Northmaven'? I finished the book with sadness, thinking I might never read it again."

It is singular that we cannot find the above passage in Scott in our edition of his works.

Mrs. Trench's journal was sent by her son, afterwards Archbishop of Dublin, to Edward FitzGerald, who received it with great favour.

"DEAR DR. TRENCH,—Thank you sincerely for the delightful little journal which I had from you yesterday, and only wished to be a dozen times as long. The beautiful note at p. 75 speaks of much yet unprinted! It is a pity Mrs. Kemble had not read p. 79. I thought in the night of 'the subdued voice of Good Sense,' and 'the eye that invites you to look into it.' I doubt I can read, more or less attentively, most personal memoirs, but I am equally sure of the superiority of this in its shrewdness, humour, natural taste, and good breeding. One is sorry for the account of Lord Nelson, but one cannot doubt it. It was at the time when he was intoxicated, I suppose, with glory and Lady Hamilton. What your mother says of the Dresden Madonna reminds me of what Tennyson once said: that the attitude of the child was that of a man; but perhaps not the less right for all that. As to the countenance, he said that scarce any man's face could look so grave and rapt as a baby's could at times. He once said of his own child: 'He was a whole hour this morning worshipping the sunshine playing on the bed-post.' He never writes letters or journals, but I hope people will be found to remember some of the things he has said as naturally as your mother wrote them."

Mrs. Trench had written: "The Virgin's face is divine. The Child, who appears about a year old, has more the expression of the King than the Saviour of the world. There is a beautiful haughtiness, mixed with disdain, in his features."

Thackeray said that "dear old Fitz" was one of his two greatest friends, but when 'Vanity Fair' took the town by storm

and its author figured in the grand world, some temporary coolness seems to have ensued between the friends. "Thackeray," FitzGerald writes, "is in such a great world that I am afraid of him; he gets tired of me, and we are content to regard each other at a distance." Thackeray's head may have been slightly turned by his marvellous success, after experiencing for years shameful neglect and disappointment; but let us hope it was mere fancy on the part of FitzGerald respecting his friend's altered manner. Be that as it may, on Thackeray's death all the old feelings of affection instantly returned.

"DEAR LAWRENCE. . . . I want to know about your two portraits of Thackeray: the first one (which I think Smith and Elder have) I know by the print. I want to know about one you last did (some two years ago?), whether you think it as good and characteristic; and also who has it. Frederic Tennyson sent me a photograph of W. M. T.—old, white, massive, and melancholy, sitting in his library. I am surprized almost to find how much I am thinking of him: so little as I had seen him for the last ten years; not once for the last five. I had been told—by you, for one—that he was spoiled. I am glad, therefore, that I have scarce seen him since he was "old Thackeray." I keep reading his 'Newcomes' of nights, and, as it were, hear him saying so much in it; and it seems to me as if he might be coming up my stairs, and about to come (singing) into my room, as in old Charlotte Street, etc., thirty years ago. . . .

"I have this summer made the acquaintance of a great lady, with whom I have become perfectly intimate, through her letters, Madame de Sévigné. I had hitherto kept aloof from her, because of that eternal daughter of hers; but 'it's all truth and daylight,' as Kitty Clive said of Mrs. Siddons. Her letters from Brittany are best of all, not those from Paris, for she loved the country, dear creature; and now I want to go and visit her '*Rochers*,' but never shall."

He really intended to journey to Brittany, but he found from 'Murray's Guide Book' that the present owner of *Les Rochers* declined to admit Sévigné enthusiasts.

There were many false reports at Woodbridge about the eccentricities of Edward FitzGerald. It was said that he went up to visit Sir Walter Scott's country, but on finding on his arrival at Newcastle that there was a train immediately starting for the south, he seized such a favourable opportunity and entered it; again, Mr. Groome informs us, it was reported that he sailed to Holland to see the works of the great painters, but when he arrived on the coast he found such a wind for his return that he could not resist its fascination. FitzGerald named his boat *The Scandal*, in honour of the town of Woodbridge's staple commodity.

Country town life is not badly described in a verse which we read the other day in an old *Gentleman's Magazine*.

"We eat, we drink, we scandal talk,
 We go to church on Sunday.
 And some they go in fear of God,
 And some of—Mrs. Grundy."

Its characteristics are, so writes FitzGerald, about the "faded tapestry" of country town life. "third-rate accomplishments infinitely prized, scandal removed from dukes and duchesses to the parson, the banker, the commissioner of excise, and the attorney."

Mrs. Kemble describes FitzGerald as living a curious life of almost entire estrangement from society, preferring the companionship of the rough sailors and fishermen of the Suffolk coast to that of lettered folk. He used to sail about in his yacht, and the rougher the sea was the more he liked it, always putting into port on Sunday that his men might have a hot dinner. He entered into partnership with a sailor, of whom he was a great friend, in a herring lugger.

"MY DEAR COWELL. . . My lugger captain has just left me to go on his mackerel voyage to the western coast; and I don't know when I shall see him again. Just after he went, a muffled bell from the church here began to toll for somebody's death: it sounded like a bell under the sea. He sat listening to the hymn played by the church chimes, last evening, and said he could hear it all as if in Lowestoft church, when he was a boy, 'Jesus our Deliverer!' You can't think what a grand, tender, soul this is, lodged in a suitable carcase."

The partnership in *Meum and Tuum*, which the profane inhabitants of Woodbridge called *Mum and Tum*, was dissolved, the captain wishing to be sole master, a desire that FitzGerald readily complied with, saying it was his right.

Edward FitzGerald in his youth was very fond of the theatre. The Haymarket was his favourite, with Liston in *Paul Pry*, and Madame Vestris in a Pamela hat, with a red feather, singing "Cherry Ripe;" he loved it also because of the old bills on the opposite colonnade, "*Medea in Corinto. Medea, Signora Pasta.*"

Hayter's sketches of Madame Pasta caused FitzGerald to write a notice of her wondrous acting.

"Looking at them now, people who never saw the original will wonder, perhaps, that Talma and Mrs. Siddons should have said that they might go to learn of her: and indeed it was only the living genius and passion of the woman herself, that could have inspired and exalted, and enlarged her very incomplete person (as it did her voice) into the grandeur, as well as the *Niobe* pathos, of her action and utterance. All the nobler features of humanity she had indeed: finely shaped head, neck, bust and arms: all finely

related to one another; the superior features too of the face: fine eyes, eyebrows—I remember Trelawny saying they reminded him of those in the East—the nose not so fine, but the whole face ‘homogeneous,’ as Lavater calls it, and capable of all expression from tragedy to farce. For I have seen her in the *Prova d'un Opera Seria*, where no one, I believe, admired her but myself—except Thomas Moore, whose journal, long after published, revealed to me one who thought—yes, and *knew*—as I did. . . . I used to admire as much as anything her attitude and air, as she stood at the side of the stage when Jason’s Bridal Procession came on: *motionless*, with one finger in her golden girdle—a habit which (I heard) she inherited from Grassini.”

An æsthetic personage once said to Pasta, “*Tous avez beaucoup étudié l'antique.*” Pasta answered, “*Je l'ai beaucoup senti.*” Edward FitzGerald would have made an admirable theatrical critic. He loved quiet acting, and could not appreciate the scolding of Grisi in the parts which had been filled by Pasta.

“In Sophie Gay’s ‘Salons de Paris,’ I read that when Mdlle. Contat (the predecessor of Mars) was learning under Prévile and his wife for the stage, she gesticulated too much, as novices do. So the Prévilles confined her arms, like ‘une momie,’ she says, and then set her off with a scene. So long as no great passion business was needed, she felt pretty comfortable, she says; but when the dialogue grew hot, then she could not help trying to get her hands free: and *that*, as the Prévilles told her, sufficiently showed where action should begin, and not till then, whether in grave or comic. This anecdote (told by Contat herself) has almost an exact counterpart in Mrs. Siddons’ practice, who recited even Lear’s curse with her hands and arms close to her side like an Egyptian figure, and Sir Walter Scott, who heard her, said nothing could be more terrible.”

The French school of acting was perfection. Madame de Genlis saw Le Kain giving a *débutant* a lesson in declamation. The young man, in the middle of a scene, seized the arm “de la Princesse.” Le Kain, shocked, said, “*Monsieur, si vous voulez paraître passionné, ayez l'air de craindre de toucher la robe de celle que vous aimez.*” It was said there were only two men who knew how to talk to women, Le Kain and M. de Vaudreuil, the friend of the Duchess of Polignac.

“One day I went into the Abbey at 3.30. P.M., while a beautiful anthem was beautifully sung, and then the prayers and collects, not less beautiful, well intoned on one single note by the minister. And when I looked up and about me, I thought that Abbey a wonderful structure for monkeys to have raised. The last night Mesdames Kemble and Edwards had each of them company, so I went into my old Opera House in the Haymarket, where I remembered the very place where Pasta stood as Medea on the stage, with Rubini singing his return to his betrothed in *Puritani*, and Taglioni floating about everywhere: and the several boxes in which sat the several ranks and beauties of forty or fifty years ago; my mother’s box on the third tier, in which I often figured as a specimen of both. The audience all changed, much for the worse, I thought; and opera and singers also; only one of them who could sing at all, and she sang

very well indeed—Trebelli her name. The opera by a Frenchman on the Wagner Plan: excellent instrumentation, but not one new or melodious idea through the whole."

"I saw Carlyle," writes FitzGerald, "and Tennyson and Spedding most and best." James Spedding, like his friend, shunned notoriety just as other people seek it. When he was offered the Under-Secretaryship of the Colonial Office, he refused it because he felt unfit to undertake its duties—an estimate of himself which was assented to by no one. He passed his literary life in attempting the hopeless task of vindicating the character of Lord Bacon—striving, as FitzGerald writes, "to wash his blackamoor white." For "how can any one," we heard Dean Milman say, "clear the character of a man who confessed he was a rogue?" FitzGerald frequently compares him to Socrates—no one was more highly estimated in literary society. Lord Houghton writes that Lady Ashburton, who could be insolent to others, once said, "I always feel a kind of average between myself and any other person, so that when I am talking to Spedding I am unutterably foolish." Like Sir Walter Scott, who was nicknamed by Peter Robertson, "Peveril of the Peak," James Spedding had a very high forehead, which we used to gaze upon with childish awe when he sat, serene and stately, on the oak bench when he was head boy at Bury School. Thackeray and FitzGerald used to be amused with this forehead. When Spedding accompanied Lord Ashburton on his mission to America, FitzGerald wrote—"You have of course read the account of Spedding's forehead having landed in America. English sailors hail it in the Channel, mistaking it for Beechy Head. There is a Shakespeare Cliff and a Spedding Cliff. Good old fellow! I hope he'll come back, forehead and all."

Thackeray declared he saw the forehead in a milestone, and drew it rising with a sober light over Mont Blanc, and reflected in the Lake of Geneva.

Spedding had once come down to visit FitzGerald—

"I have not seen any one you know since I last wrote; nor heard from any one, except dear old Spedding, who really came down and spent two days with us—me and that scholar and his wife, in their village, in their delightful little house, in their pleasant fields by the river side. Old Spedding was delicious there; always leaving a mark, as I say, in all places one has been at with him, a sort of Platonic perfume. For has he not all the beauty of the Platonic Socrates, with some personal beauty to boot? He explained to us one day about the laws of reflection in water: and I said then, one could never look at the willow, whose branches furnished the text, without thinking of him. How beastly this reads! As if he gave us a lecture! But you know the man, how quietly it all came out; only because I petulantly denied his plain assertion. For I

really often cross him only to draw him out ; and, vain as I may be, he is one of those that I am well content to make shine at my own expense."

James Spedding met with a terrible accident, being run over by a hansom cab when trying to pass the road in Berkeley Street, opposite the Lansdowne Passage. He had got out of the way of one cab and returned to the pavement ; but, having again tried to cross, a hansom, with a Member of Parliament as a passenger, which Spedding did not see, knocked him down. The cab did not stop, but went on rapidly to the Great Western station. Spedding was taken to St. George's Hospital. He exonerated the cabman from blame ; of course he would do that, it was his nature. FitzGerald writes to Mrs. Kemble—

"MY DEAR LADY,—It was very very good and kind of you to write to me about Spedding. Yes : Aldis Wright had apprised me of the matter just after it happened, he happening to be in London at the time ; and but two days after the accident heard that Spedding was quite calm, and even cheerful ; only anxious that Wright himself should not be kept waiting for some communication that S. had promised him ! Whether to live or to die, he will be Socrates still. Directly that I heard from Wright, I wrote to Mowbray Donne to send me just a post card daily, if he or his wife could, with but one or two words on it, 'Better,' 'Less well,' or whatever it might be. This morning I hear that all is going on even better than could be expected, according to Miss Spedding. But I suppose the crisis, which you tell me of, is not yet come ; and I have always a terror of that French adage, '*Monsieur se porte mal—Monsieur se porte mieux—Monsieur est—*' Ah, you know, or you guess the rest. My dear old Spedding, though I have not seen him these twenty years and more, and probably shall never see him again ; but he lives, his old self, in my heart of hearts ; and all I hear of him does but embellish the recollection of him, if it could be embellished ; for he is but the same that he was from a boy, all that is best in heart and head, a man that would be incredible, had one not known him. I certainly should have gone up to London, even with eyes that will scarce face the lamps of Woodbridge—not to see him, but to have the first intelligence I could about him. But I rely on the post card for but a night's delay. Lawrence, Mowbray tells me, had been to see him, and found him as calm as had been reported by Wright. But the doctors had said he should be kept as quiet as possible."

Such was the esteem Carlyle felt for Spedding, that FitzGerald writes if he had been alive he would have been carried to the hospital to see him.

There is a charming letter from FitzGerald to Mrs. Kemble, recalling the days when he stayed with his friend Spedding in the Cumberland mountains.

MY DEAR LADY,—I have let the full-moon pass because I thought you had written to me so lately, and so kindly, about our lost Spedding, that I would not call on you so soon again. Of him I will say nothing, except

that his death has made me recall very many passages in his life in which I was partly concerned. In particular, staying at his Cumberland home along with Tennyson in the May of 1835. '*Voilà bien longtemps de ça!*' His father and mother were both alive; he, a wise man, who mounted his cob after breakfast, and was at his farm till dinner at two; then away again till tea, after which he sat reading by a shaded lamp, saying very little, but always courteous, and quite content with any company his son might bring to the house, so long as they let him go his own way—which, indeed, he would have gone whether they let him or no. But he had seen enough of poets not to like them or their trade—Shelley for a long time living among the lakes; Coleridge, at Southey's, whom perhaps he had a respect for—Southey, I mean—and Wordsworth, whom I do not think he valued. He was rather jealous of 'Jem'—who might have done any available service in the world, he thought—giving himself up to such dreamers, and sitting up with Tennyson conning over the 'Morte d'Arthur,' 'Lord of Burleigh,' and other things which helped to make up the two volumes of 1842. So I always associate that 'Arthur' idyl with Basanthwaite Lake and Skiddaw. Mrs. Spedding was a sensible, motherly lady, with whom I used to play chess of a night. And there was an old friend of hers, Miss Bristowe, who always reminded me of Miss La Creery, if you know of such a person, in 'Nickleby.'"

Shelley, rampaging about the peaceful Lake land with pistols, must have horrified good Mr. Spedding, who was not at all satisfied with his son's devotion to Tennyson. "What is it?" he said to FitzGerald, "Mr. Tennyson reads and Jem criticises—is that it?"

FitzGerald, like Alceste in *Le Misanthrope*, preferred the French prose and poetry of the olden time to the new style developed in the age of Louis XIV. In an unpublished letter to Mrs. Kemble, he writes—

"The French writers and the French language could *touch the heart*, both in prose and verse, till *their* Augustan age of Louis XIV. tamed and formalized them, as *our* Queen Anne's did ours. I copy for you a stray wild-note from old Normandy—

'Dieu garde de déshonneur
 Celle que j'ai longtemps aimée!
 Je l'aimois de tout mon cœur;
 Ma jeunesse est passée.
 Or vois-je bien que c'est follye
 D'y mettre sa pensée,
 Quand elle me dit en plorant:
 "Nos amours sont finis,
 Nos amours sont finis."

Do you remember the beautiful '*mais l'on revient toujours*' of our young days? I saw that M. Faure had been reviving the song in London; I always said Rubini should have done that. The words are only not as beautiful as the music."

An extract from a Suffolk paper has been sent us which gives a graphic account of FitzGerald "at home."

"In the little retreat he had made for himself in the outskirts of the town they had battled with him over lines from works much of the reading community had never looked into; they had revelled with him in passages from authors many a reader had never heard of. But some knew him in another light. To such he was something more than an equal—more than an equal, at any rate, if the measure were laid on these lines. None but those who knew him thus had felt to the full the infinite delicacy with which he would bridge over the chasm which divided their learning from his. Unfortunately, it too often pertains to the man who knows much to make his superiority especially conspicuous to those who know less. There was nothing of this at Little Grange. Whatever the company were, one ever felt he was treated as an equal. Without any apparent effort, the guest, however humble, was always made to feel at his ease. Correction to a misquotation was never made a point of notice; at most, it was met with the gentle, 'Oh dear, I always thought it was so-and-so had written that,' etc. A doubtful passage, the key to which seemed lost in the distance of time, would be incontrovertibly settled by a recollection of some fifty years' standing—but there was no triumph, no victory in the announcement. His readings from favourite poets were delightful. With what spellbound interest would one listen when he had a mind to give you something from his dearly-loved Tennyson, to make you see it in its best and brightest rendering! How charmingly he would interline it with some personal description, only to make more real the reality of the scene before you! How one basked in the genial modulation of a voice apparently toned to make the best of another's words!"

The charm of FitzGerald's letters is that we see him as he lived, pining in murky London for his anemones and the sighing of his Scotch firs; appreciating all the *minutiæ* of country life, pitying the robin, poor little fellow, who had built his nest, having trusted to the false indications of spring. We see him, when his eyes had been nearly destroyed by paraffin lamps, listening to a boy reading 'Guy Mannering' to him, whilst the nightingale was singing on the tree, just as in Shakespeare's time. Then the boy reads Tichborne, *every word*, FitzGerald's heart leaping at Sir John Coleridge's description of the "unfortunate nobleman" by a quotation from Tennyson—

"Read rascal in the motions of his back,
And scoundrel in the supple-sliding knee."

Then reading 'Lothair,' resembling a pleasant magic lantern—when finished, to be forgotten. After the reading, having "grub with the boy in the pantry," sending him to a representation of *Macbeth* by a strolling company, the boy bringing home a new reading of Shakespeare, "Hang out our *gallows* on the outward walls," which will be perhaps adopted by some enterprising

manager. Lastly, we see him at Lowestoft, delighting in the reading of Carlyle's 'Kings of Norway,' whilst the old sea—showing, like Carlyle, no signs of decrepitude—was rolling in from that north, and looking up from his book, seeing a Norwegian barque beating southward close to the shore, with nearly all sail set.

"It seems strange," FitzGerald wrote in May, 1883, to his niece, "to be so seemingly alert—certainly alive—amid such fatalities with younger and stronger people. But even while I say so, the hair may break and the suspended sword fall. If it would do so at once and effectually!" Sixteen days later FitzGerald died in his sleep.

There is a stanza which Gray threw out of his 'Elegy' which FitzGerald thought so beautiful:

"There scattered oft, the earliest of the year,
By hands unseen, are showers of violets found,
The redbreast loves to build and warble there,
And little footsteps lightly print the ground."

Let us hope that this description applies to the little churchyard at Boulge, where Edward FitzGerald lies, with an inscription on his tombstone, "It is He that has made us, and not we ourselves."

2-4-75

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

PR Edward Fitzgerald
4703
E3

